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Time for Wisconsin to Accept the Medicaid Expansion

By Representative Dianne Hesselbein

Wisconsin support for Medicaid Expansion is growing. The most recent Marquette University Law School poll revealed 70% of Wisconsinites support the Medicaid Expansion—a significant increase from the 62% support reported in January of this year. As the Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee reviews the Governor’s Budget Proposal, they will do well to remember Wisconsinites want access to affordable healthcare, and the opportunity exists to provide it with Medicaid Expansion money. Unfortunately, since 2014 Wisconsin Republicans have stood on the opposite side of public opinion and refused to accept the federal funds.

Fact: insuring more people means healthier families and a healthier Wisconsin workforce. Let’s consider the positive impacts the Medicaid Expansion will have on our state. Over 80,000 people across Wisconsin would gain access to affordable health coverage under BadgerCare; postpartum coverage for mothers on Medicaid could be extended from 60 days to one year; and Wisconsin could increase dental reimbursement rate for providers serving low income individuals and individuals with disabilities.

Governor Evers’ budget proposes assisting all individuals in crisis, including those in need of substance abuse treatment, and Medicaid Expansion would help our state address the opioid crisis. Low-income adults in Wisconsin are an especially high-risk population more likely to be uninsured and vulnerable to opioid abuse. Those relying on mental health services would benefit from the additional funding the Medicaid Expansion would provide in the budget.

Accepting the expansion proposal makes sound fiscal sense, saving Wisconsin taxpayers \$325 million while providing needed medical care. Inexplicably, Republicans have blocked the Medicaid Expansion at every turn. The non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates the Republican refusal has cost Wisconsin taxpayers over a billion dollars in spending since the funding was available. That’s our money left on the table, and it’s time for us to claim it.

Every single one of our neighboring states has accepted the Medicaid Expansion. Even former Republican governors like Chris Christie of New Jersey, John Kasich of Ohio, Jan Brewer of Arizona, and Vice President Mike Pence have all praised the positive impact of the Medicaid Expansion in their states.

Despite our states ongoing loss of rural medical facilities, Republican legislators don’t seem to care that rural hospitals in neighboring states are functioning well, largely due to Medicaid Expansion. This highlights how vital this funding is to our rural communities.

If the fiscal and moral reasons are not enough reasons for Republican leaders to expand Medicaid, perhaps they will consider the will of the people. Polling makes clear Wisconsin overwhelmingly wants to accept the Medicaid Expansion, and it is equally clear our state will benefit. It’s time for the legislature to do what the people of Wisconsin want: accept our Medicaid money.

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